

Chosen – Ephesians 1:4-6

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Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love he predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved. – Ephesians 1:3-6, ESV

When a house is being built, architects and engineers draw up detailed plans for the house, planning and designing every aspect of it. Then, a builder actually builds the house. Finally, a realtor actually works with you, the homeowner, to get you into the house. Then, the house becomes your home.

Similarly, God the Father perfectly planned our redemption, Jesus fulfilled the Father's plan and accomplished redemption, and now the Holy Spirit brings us to share in Christ's redemption and all of its benefits.

In a perfect world with a perfect architect, engineer and builder, the process would be seamless and flawless from beginning to end. Alas, we do not live in a perfect world and none of these professionals is perfect, so we deal with "value engineering" and "design flaws" and "engineering miscalculations" and "builder error."

Thankfully, the three persons of the Triune God **are** perfect and so our redemption is accomplished and applied perfectly from beginning to end.

Last week, we saw that God is worthy to be praised because of what He has done for us in blessing us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places. Some pastors and scholars have described the rest of this long sentence of praise from verse 4 through verse 14 as a catalog of those spiritual blessings we have in Christ. But it can't be, at least not a comprehensive catalog.

As we sang last week, we have "10,000 Reasons" to bless the Lord. The number of the "every spiritual blessing" we receive is impossible to count or comprehensively catalog.

So instead of a catalog, I think what we have here is praise to God which centers around the major blessing activities of each member of the Trinity – Father, Son and Holy Spirit:

1. In verses 3-6, which we're looking at today, the choosing activity of God the Father is in main view. We could say this describes the purpose and plan to give us every spiritual

blessing.

2. Next week, in verses 7-12, the redeeming activity of God the Son will be in main view. We could say those verses describe the accomplishing of the redeeming work by which we receive every spiritual blessing.
3. In two weeks, in verse 13-14, the sealing work of God the Holy Spirit will be in main view. We could say those verses describe the application of the beginning of every spiritual blessing to us and the guarantee of the full application of every spiritual blessing to us perfectly and permanently in glory.

I. **God's Eternal Purpose**

Paul begins verse 4 by saying that God has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places **EVEN AS** or **JUST AS** He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world. This connecting word translated “even as” in the ESV and “for” in the NIV means two things:

1. Our spiritual blessings come to us ***in the same way as*** God's choosing us before the foundation of the world.
2. Our spiritual blessings come to us ***because*** God has chosen us before the foundation of the world.

a. **He chose us before the foundation of the world**

For some reason, many people have a hard time accepting the idea that God chose us, even though it is clearly taught in Scripture. Some have even said that what Paul means when he says, “He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world” is that God chose to bring salvation through Christ to whoever would believe in Him. In other words, the only chosen one is Christ, and we're chosen in Him only in the sense that we have come to believe in Him and share in the benefits of His redemption. But that's not what Paul is teaching.

What Paul is teaching us is that our spiritual blessing, our salvation, is not an accident or a mere possibility or the combination of random forces and circumstances. God purposed it before He created the world.

God chose us. The word in Greek means that He made a free choice from among a full range of options for His own reasons, even for His own benefit. He did so before He began to create the world. He chose us.

b. To be holy and blameless before Him in love

But Paul tells us that God did more than just choose us. He chose us for something. Of course, that's the nature of choosing. When you choose someone, you choose them for some role, purpose or destiny. We're in the beginnings of a presidential election right now, and we're being asked to choose who we think would be a good president.

When I was a kid, I always hated choosing. I am not a very good athlete, and it seems like the majority of choosing we did as kids was for teams in some athletic competition. We never had playground debates or speech meets or writing matches. It was always kickball or dodgeball or something like that. And I was always picked last, which is basically the same as not being picked at all. I was always excited when some really little kid or a bunch of girls were playing because there was at least a chance that I wasn't going to be picked last. Before you feel too sorry for me, just know that those kids were right to pick me last. I was the worst athlete in my class, consistently.

Here's the amazing thing about God's picking: He doesn't pick those who are qualified, He qualifies those who are picked.

The destiny God had in mind when He chose us is to be holy and blameless before Him in love. But He picks us "in Him" – that is, in Christ. It is in Christ that we are chosen because it is in Christ that we will be made holy and blameless before Him in love.

We're never told in Scripture that God chooses people because of the great qualifications he sees in them:

- Moses was a poor speaker and a murderer on the run when God chose him.
- David was the overlooked and forgotten youngest son of Jesse who was out tending the sheep when God chose him.
- God said to Israel in Deuteronomy 7:7, *"It was not because you were more in number than any other people that the LORD set his love on you and chose you, for you were the fewest of all peoples."*

Or consider what Paul wrote to the Corinthians in I Corinthians 1:26-31 –

“For consider your calling, brothers: not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, so that no human being might boast in the presence of God. And because of him you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption, so that, as it is written, “Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord.”

God did not choose you because you were so wise or powerful or holy. But He did choose you to be in Christ, who is our wisdom, righteousness, sanctification and redemption. So we can't boast, “God chose me!” But we can boast of Jesus, who is our full qualification before God.

In Christ, God chose us to be holy and blameless before Him in love:

- Holiness speaks of spiritual devotion, of being set apart for God, dedicated to God, devoted to God.
- Blamelessness speaks of moral purity, of being without fault.
- In love speaks both of our love toward God and toward one another, that we would be fully standing “in love,” which Jesus said was most important – to love God with all of our heart, all of our soul and all of our mind and to love our neighbor as ourselves.

You'll notice that I put “in love” as the end of the thought of verse four and not as the beginning of the thought of verse 5. That is different from how the ESV, the NIV and the NASB have all rendered it, but here I agree with the KJV and the NRSV. The difference between the two isn't really a matter of understanding the Greek better; the Greek itself could go either way. But Paul's normal pattern of writing in this sentence flow would favor putting “in love” as a modifier with what comes before and not with what comes after.

But even more helpful is understanding how Paul thinks and writes about the concept of being holy and blameless before God the Father. Here's a close parallel passage from I Thessalonians 3:12-13:

may the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all, as we do for you, so that he may establish your hearts blameless in holiness before our God and Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints. (ESV)

For Paul, these three attributes – holiness, blamelessness and love – are the family characteristics of the children of God. This is what characterizes Jesus and what fulfills God's purpose for all of His children.

This passage from I Thessalonians also helps us see when God will make us holy and blameless before Him in love – at the coming of our Lord Jesus.

Now, in Christ, God sees us as being holy, blameless and in love because Christ is all these things fully and perfectly for us. Now, the Holy Spirit is doing the work of putting these qualities into us by grace. One day, when we stand before Him, complete and fully redeemed, these three qualities will be fully realized and on eternal display in each one of us personally and in all of us together.

Isn't it amazing to believe and anticipate that reality?

God's Wonderful Means/Method

If the end for which God has chosen us is to be holy and blameless before Him in love, what's His plan for how He'll get us there?

a. He predestined us for adoption through Jesus Christ to Himself

God's chosen plan to bring us to Himself and make us holy and blameless in love before Him is to adopt us as His children through Jesus Christ. When He chose us to be holy and blameless in love in Christ, He predestined us to be adopted as His children through Jesus Christ.

We had to be adopted *through Jesus Christ* because Jesus alone has the natural right of Sonship before God. By uniting with us and identifying with us, Jesus gives us the right to become children of God.

What Paul says here in Ephesians 1:5 is the same as what the Apostle John wrote in the first chapter of His Gospel, in John 1:11-13: "*He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.*"

Both Paul and John affirm that our becoming children of God happened according to the will of God. If you are not yet a child of God by faith in Jesus Christ, or you're not sure, God's Word to you is this: "*But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God.*" But if you are a child of God, God's word for you is this: "[you] were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God."

Literally, Paul says, *“having marked us out ahead of time for sonship by Jesus Christ to himself according to the good pleasure of his will.”*

You may notice that my literal rendering is different from the ESV, which says, *“he predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will,”*

To “predestine” something is to mark it out ahead of time. But the ESV is missing the phrase “to himself” (they left it untranslated) and it says *“according to the purpose of his will”* instead of *“according to the good pleasure of his will”*

b. According to the good pleasure of His will

Paul is actually saying that God’s decision to mark us out ahead of time for adoption as sons to himself was pleasing to God. It was a decision made according to the good pleasure or the delight of His will. It pleased God to predestine us to be His children; it delighted Him. It was a pleasant and delightful decision.

This expression re-emphasizes the fact that it was not anything we did for God or anything God saw in us in terms of goodness or effort or worthiness. Rather, God predestined us to be adopted as His children through Jesus Christ because it pleased Him to do so. He did it according to the good pleasure of His will.

The idea that it pleased God to predestine us for adoption is something we looked at a few weeks ago when we were in Romans 8 and we also confessed earlier this morning, though you might have missed it.

Romans 8:29-30 says, *“For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified.”*

The word “foreknew” means that God loved us as His own ahead of time. Those whom He loved ahead of time, *“He predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, in order that He might be the firstborn among many brothers.”*

Where Paul talks about God foreknowing us in Romans 8:29, he refers to God choosing us in Ephesians 1:4. What’s clear in both words – foreknew and chose – is this astounding truth that we struggle to really understand and accept: If you are a believer in the Lord Jesus, a true Christian who has come to know and love Jesus as your Lord and Savior, Paul says this about you:

The God of the Universe, the God and Father of the Lord Jesus Christ, loves you. He has loved you from before the foundation of the world. In love, He chose you for Himself in Christ. In love, it pleased Him to predestine you to be adopted as His son or daughter with the full rights of Sonship to the God of the Universe.

The musical *Annie* has been a favorite of audiences around the world since 1977, having been made into three different popular movie versions. We all love the idea of a poor orphan girl being adopted by a wealthy billionaire. It warms our hearts to see how Annie wins over the hard-hearted Daddy Warbucks and how he falls in love with this little girl and adopts her as his own daughter forever.

But the real life story of salvation is even better: The God who framed the worlds with His word, who rules and sustains all things in the universe, set His love upon His own before the worlds were formed. Before you were born or had done anything good or bad, knowing how much you would sin and rebel and how little you would deserve His favor, God loved you. He so loved you that He was willing to give His Son to redeem you and make you His own forever.

III. God's Glorious Goals

And the goals God accomplishes in choosing us are as wonderful as the story itself . . .

We get every spiritual blessing and He gets all the glory!

a. Our Good: Adoption and Glorification

God has one chief purpose for the universe: All things exist to display His glory, that He might be exalted as wonderful, powerful, wise and worthy of praise. But God has chosen by grace to tie His glory and our good together as two inseparable ends toward which He is working all things.

And so God works all things for His glory AND for our good. We get the benefits – immense, indescribable, eternal, unchangeable. We get to be the glorified, holy, blameless, loving children of God forever.

b. His Glory: To the praise of His glorious grace, with which He has blessed us in the beloved

AND God gets the glory. “He *predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved.*”

We live in a crazy world where things don't often go according to plan. Once, in a workshop on strategic planning, I learned that only 3% of the plans begun by leaders actually end in the successful accomplishment of the plan. That means that 97% of man-made plans fail.

Why do our plans fail? Many reasons, including . . .

1. We don't have enough information when we made the plan.
2. We don't have the resources to fund the plan.
3. Accomplishing the plan isn't worth the cost.
4. Our desires about what we planned change.
5. We meet opposition to the plan which we cannot overcome.
6. We get busy and distracted by other priorities.

Here's the great news about God's amazing plans: He always accomplishes them.

When Paul says, “He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world that we should be holy and blameless before Him in love, having predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself,” you can be sure that God's eternal choice and plan of predestination WILL come to pass.

God will not find out later that He did not have enough information or that He doesn't have the resources or decide that the plan isn't worth the cost (He's already paid it!). He won't change His mind or give up on the good pleasure of His will. He won't face any opposition He can't overcome and he won't get too busy or distracted by other plans.

As Paul says in Philippians 1:6, “*I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.*” God planned your salvation, adoption and blessing from before the foundation of the world. He won't give up until you stand before Him as His child, holy and blameless and in love – forever!